

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended) A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:

sensing the identity of a customer;

using a computer to selectively provide the customer access to a first secure area based upon the sensed identity, the first secure area being connected to a plurality of second secure areas, one of which is assigned to the customer and includes a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;

using a computer to selectively provide the customer access to return a piece of rental equipment to the second secure area assigned to the customer based upon the sensed identity, the second secure area including the piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;

automatically sensing status information about the customer's use of the piece of rental equipment from the piece of rental equipment when it is returned to the second secure area; and

billing the customer for use of the piece of rental equipment based on the status information sensed from the piece of rental equipment.

2. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further including the step of: recording what the customer ~~removes from~~returns to the second secure area in an automated manner.

3. (Currently amended) The method of claim 2, further including the steps of:

comparing what the customer ~~removes from~~returns to the second secure area to a list of equipment corresponding to the customer; and

recording the difference between what the customer ~~takes from~~returns to the second secure area and the list of equipment corresponding to the customer in an automated manner.

4. (Currently amended) The method of claim 2, further including the steps of:

comparing what the customer ~~removes from~~returns to the second secure area to a list of equipment corresponding to the customer; and

preventing the customer from leaving the first secure area if what the customer ~~takes from~~returns to the second secure area does not match the list of equipment corresponding to the customer.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:

starting a recording device when the identity of the customer is sensed; and

stopping the recording device after a predetermined amount of time has passed.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the recording device includes one or more security cameras.

7. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further including the step of: permitting the customer to return remove the piece of equipment from the first secure area.

8. (Currently amended) A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:

sensing the identity of a customer;
using a computer to selectively provide the customer access to a secure area based upon the sensed identity, the secure area including a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;

using a computer to sense an identifier on the piece of equipment and starting status information related to operation of the piece of equipment as the equipment is moved within a predetermined distance from an exit of the secure area; and

allowing the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the secure area;
using a computer to sense return status information from the piece of equipment when the customer returns the piece of equipment to the secure area; and

billing the customer for use of the piece of equipment based on the starting status information and the return status information.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, further including the step of: allowing the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the secure area when the identity of the customer corresponds to the identifier on the piece of equipment.

10. (Currently amended) The method of claim 9, further including the step of:

automatically recording the starting status information and what the customer removes from the secure area.

11. (Original) The method of claim 9, further including the steps of: starting a recording device when the identity of the customer is sensed; and stopping the recording device after a predetermined amount of time has passed.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein the recording device includes one or more security cameras.

13. (Currently amended) A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:

sensing the identity of a customer;

using a computer to selectively provide the customer access to one of a plurality of secure areas based upon the sensed identity, the one secure area being assigned to the customer; and ~~containing a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;~~ and

allowing the customer to ~~remove the~~ return a piece of equipment ~~from~~ to the one secure area;

automatically sensing status information about maintenance needed by the returned piece of equipment; and

billing the customer for costs associated with the maintenance needed by the returned piece of equipment.

14. (Currently amended) The method of claim 13, further including the step of:

automatically recording what equipment the customer ~~removes from~~ returns to the one secure area.

15. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the customer identity indicates that the customer is a member of an approved group of renters and wherein the one secure area includes equipment available to the approved group of renters.

16. (Currently amended) A system for managing rental equipment, comprising:

a first secure area;

a plurality of second secure areas accessible from the first secure area, one of which is assigned to a customer ~~and includes a piece of equipment to be rented by the customer;~~

an access controller that selectively allows the customer to access the second secure area assigned to the customer; and

~~a computer that records~~ status sensor that senses status information about operation of a piece of equipment after the customer accesses the second secure area; ~~and~~

an invoice component that bills the customer for operation of the piece of equipment based on the sensed status information.

17. (Original) The system of claim 16, further including a sensor that records a piece of equipment removed from the second secure area.

18. (Original) The system of claim 17, wherein the sensor includes at least one of: radio frequency identification tag reader and bar code reader.

19. (Original) The system of claim 17, wherein the sensor includes a GPS-based sensor.

20. (Original) The system of claim 16, further including a sensor that records a piece of equipment returned to the second secure area.

21. (Original) The system of claim 20, wherein the sensor includes at least one of: radio frequency identification tag reader and bar code reader.

22. (Original) The system of claim 20, wherein the sensor includes a GPS-based sensor.

23. (Original) The system of claim 16, further including a sensor that records goods removed from the second secure area.

24. (Currently amended) A system for managing rental equipment, comprising:

a secure area including a piece of equipment to be rented by a customer;
an access controller that selectively allows the customer to access the secure area when an identity of the customer is verified;
a sensor that, upon removal of the piece of equipment, senses an identifier on the piece of equipment, senses starting status information about operation of the piece of equipment, and directs the access controller to allow the customer to remove the piece of equipment from the secure area when the identifier on the piece of equipment corresponds to the identity of the customer and, upon return of the piece of equipment, senses return status information about operation of the piece of equipment; and

~~a computer that records the status information when the customer removes the piece of equipment from the secure area automatically creates a bill in an amount based on the starting status information and the return status information.~~

25. (Original) The system of claim 24, further including:

a tracking system that automatically records the equipment removed by the customer.

26-28. (Cancelled.)

29. (Currently amended) A system for providing goods to a customer, comprising:

a first secure area;

a plurality of second secure areas accessible from the first secure area, one of which is assigned to a customer and includes goods to be purchased by the customer;

an access controller that selectively allows the customer to ~~access~~ return rental equipment to the second secure area assigned to the customer;

a sensor that detects maintenance needed by a piece of rental equipment returned by the customer to the second secure area; and

an invoice component that automatically bills the customer for costs associated with the maintenance needed by the returned piece of equipment.

30. (Original) The system of claim 29, further including a sensor that records goods removed from the second secure area.

31. (Currently amended) A method of managing rental equipment, comprising the steps of:

sensing the identity of a customer;
using a computer to selectively provide the customer access to a secure area based upon the sensed identity, the secure area associated with the customer; ~~and~~
sensing an identifier on a piece of equipment and status information related to the customer's use of the piece of equipment as the piece of equipment is moved within a predetermined distance from an entrance of the secure area; ~~and~~
automatically billing the customer for use of the piece of equipment in an amount based on the sensed status information.

32. (Original) The method of claim 31, further including the step of:

automatically recording what the customer returns to the secure area.

33-34. (Cancelled.)